



Room to Read®

BOOK
CAPTAIN

WIDENING IMPACTFUL EDUCATION

Room to Read Bangladesh
Annual Report 2021

Book



Room

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GUIDANCE

Badruzzaman Khan
Moinul Haque
Ruksana Sultana
Borhan Uddin
Zakir Hossain

IDEAS & STORIES

Zoynal Abedin
Shykhuluzzaman Minar
Mani Mistry
Chittapriya Acharjya
Abdullah Mamun

EDITING

Rakhi Sarkar

DRAFTING & DESIGN

Amiruzzaman Tamal
Afzal Siddique

PHOTOS

Pages i, iii, 08, 22, 30: Amiruzzaman
Tamal/Room to Read; Pages v, 04,
07, 11, 12, 19, 20, 26, 27: Room to
Read; Pages 13, 16, 21, 24, 28: Fahad
Kaizer/Room to Read

PRINTER

...

+880 2 2222 71275, 2222 71201

+880 2 2222 70952

bangladesh@roomtoread.org

roomtoread.org/countries/bangladesh

facebook.com/RoomToReadBangladesh

youtube.com/RoomToReadBangladesh

linkedin.com/company/room-to-read-bangladesh

World Change Starts
with Educated Children.®



Dear friends,

To recover learning loss, retain learners and refresh knowledge/skills of teachers, Room to Read Bangladesh explored alternative learning modalities during and after C19-induced school closures in 2021. We adopted new avenues to help children and teachers first through remote support to facilitate distance learning and – when schools opened later in 2021 – in a blended mode towards safeguarding children’s futures.

While nothing could have prepared us for COVID-19, more than a decade of grassroots experience and our own learning from 2020 equipped us to transform our technical capacity and leverage on our adaptability to not just persevere, but to thrive in the prolonged education emergency and to offset the looming ‘shadow pandemic’ in 2021.

2020 through 2021, we realized just how nimble we can be as we shifted our programs to meet students’ evolving needs. Our creative culture provided pathways to meet young learners and their families where they were. We delivered storybooks as printables and ensured regular supply of worksheets and stationaries to children at home.

For the capacity development of the educators and staff members, we developed self-paced online training package hosted on *Muktapaath* of a2i – the digital platform under the Prime Minister’s office. We will keep communicating with teachers and government officials for updates on the project and bring further teaching-learning resources made available to Primary school teachers across the country.

This is besides disseminating various digital content e.g., celebrity read-aloud videos aired on popular national & local television channels, toll-free audio content for children on their parents’ smartphones, digital books etc.

We supported adolescent girls, many of whom faced increased pressure to drop out, with

remote mentoring via text messages and phone calls. Group mentoring and psychosocial support continued via remote audio-video calls. We developed television and radio programs for national networks to spark imaginations and provide comfort, joy and escape during lockdowns. We were elated to witness a record high turnout of adolescent girls when schools opened.

I thank my colleagues for extending support with renewed dedication to accomplish the deliverables and achieve organizational goals. I am glad to have observed the flexibility and openness of our partner communities, our institutional funders and the government for inspiring us to build the education momentum through actions large and small.

I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my colleagues. And I would like to congratulate the children and the teachers we serve to keep their learning curve open.

Let’s continue this journey.

Rakhi Sarkar
Country Director
Room to Read Bangladesh

WHO WE ARE

Founded in 2000 on the belief that

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

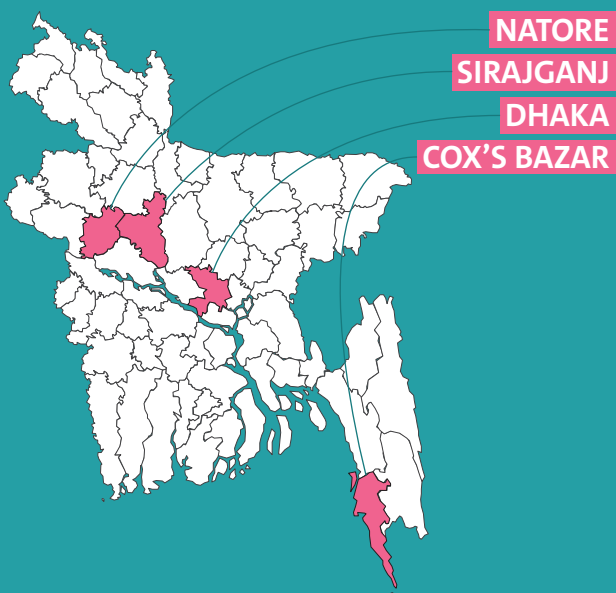
Room to Read is a global organization transforming the lives of millions of children in low-income communities by focusing on literacy and gender equality in education. We envision a world in which all children can pursue a quality education that prepares them to be fulfilled and make positive change – in their families, communities and the world.

We target deep and systemic transformation within schools during two time periods that are most critical in a child's schooling: early Primary school for literacy acquisition and Secondary school for girls' education. Room to Read has benefited more than 32 million children in over 49,000 communities across 21 countries with additional support through remote solutions that facilitate learning beyond the classroom.

We combine the science of learning to read with the magic of loving to read. We sustain students' reading skills development by providing child-friendly libraries and quality children's books. We are developing a generation of independent readers and learners who are breaking the cycle of illiteracy within their own families.

We also equip adolescent girls with the tools to self-advocate and chart a path that they choose for themselves. We involve diverse stakeholders to support the creation of a gender-equal world.

We design, implement and institutionalize effective and efficient models for achieving quality learning outcomes related to literacy and gender equality. We operate at the nexus of long-term, school-level implementation and positive, trusted relationships with governments. This experience positions us as a thought-leader in literacy and gender equality, capable of galvanizing support and action of government partners for system-level change.





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THEORY OF CHANGE

An updated, robust theory that is global and yet accommodates rural context was at the heart of our thinking and action throughout 2021. It helped us reflect on the relationship between our programs and the implementation strategy. Following inputs that range from building skills of teachers to sharing teaching-learning resources, working with the school management, family & community to instill a zeal for education as well as informing and empowering adolescent girls, we liaise with policy makers about what we can do jointly.



Public policies and practices that focus appropriate resources toward achieving literacy outcomes and delivering gender-transformative life skills at scale.

INNOVATION AND DEMONSTRATION APPROACH

Room to Read partners with governments and other stakeholders to test and implement innovative models that help children succeed in school by achieving positive literacy outcomes and gender-transformative life skills.

Informed policy uptake for early-grade literacy and gender-transformative life skill outcomes create an enabling environment for wider and stronger education and its management. In this design, children and their families from direct program support acquire the necessary skills and attitude toward positive change. Alongside the teachers and education sector officials of the government, they contribute to developing and accessing equitable solutions to the most pressing challenges the communities face in the longer term.



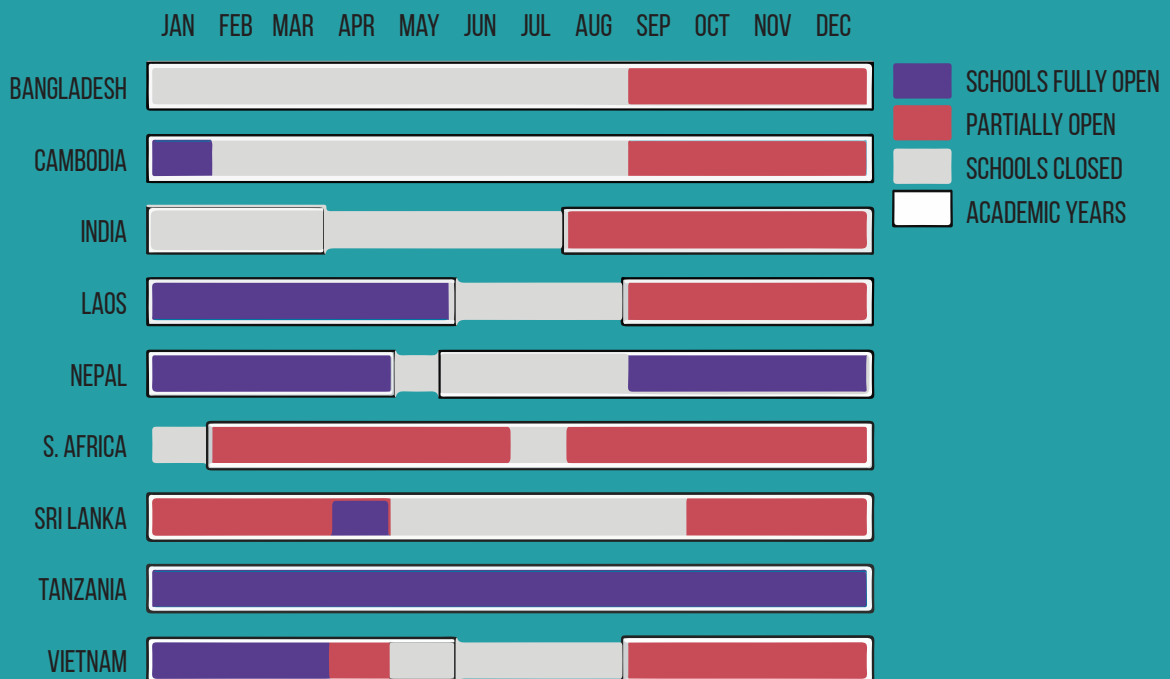
All children are fulfilled and have the necessary skills to make positive change and contribute equitable solutions to the most pressing challenges—in their families, communities and the world.

COLLABORATION AND EXPANSION APPROACH

Through targeted technical assistance and increased cost-share, Room to Read leverages our practical experience and operational excellence to partner with governments and other stakeholders, integrating best practices into the education system in order to maximize positive outcomes for children at scale.

COUNTRY BACKGROUND

C19 pandemic sweeping across the globe for the consecutive second year, the communities, families and children continued to be affected in many ways. Children in almost all locations especially in the historically underserved communities were particularly vulnerable to learning loss and learning deficit. Girls were at increased risk of falling behind in school, facing neglect or pressures to drop out permanently and be married off, succumbing to child labor to help support with household expenses and encountering an increased risk of domestic violence.



Throughout 2021, Room to Read Bangladesh continued to master a spirit of innovation with comradery to keep serving children who continued to find themselves out of school for most of 2021. Drawing upon our decades of work in children’s literacy and gender equality, we adjusted our evolving program and operations approach. We resumed operating in-person office on roster from 25 August in the country office and since 1 September in our Program locations. After 18 months of closure, schools finally reopened on 12 September leaving us a limited window to develop resources for sessions starting in January 2022.

Students facing gatekeeper exams started attending in-person classes 6 days a week while the rest attended classes at schools for 1 day a week. Although the rate of students returning to school was low across the country, a large number of students were back in the schools we support. A survey conducted in September showed that 86% of 3,788 girls returned to school. Data also showed, child marriage was the leading cause for girls dropping out of school.



Despite C19-induced closures and restrictions throughout most of 2021, we were ambitious enough to press on for continued reach of children and teachers with fresh access to learning materials remotely. We also finalized our country strategy and focused on renewing ties with local and national level stakeholders. To institutional donors and bilateral development partners, we also pitched about the rising need of learners and changing modes of contact in the host communities and as well as the refugee community.

Moreover, we completed all of the planned procurement with the fiscal alongside finalizing our 2022 plans and budget. The momentum sped up with approval of 100% fund from NGOAB and acceptance of the 2020 audit report. We also complied to all VAT and Tax regulations and reporting to the government on time. Our 'Statutory Audit' also completed with no major observation.

The pandemic continued to worsen and with a national lockdown enforced, there was uncertainty around reopening of schools and learning centers. Moreover, government's prolonged revisit of its I/NGO engagement policy put our school-level program interventions such as literacy-focused classroom instruction support, classroom library activity, training of Primary school teachers and government officials etc. on hold impacting both Program quality and timely budget spending.

In spite of the fact that schools are getting back to their normal schedules, both students and teachers still urgently need more of our help to combat learning loss in a world where the future of education systems remains uncertain. Regardless of what happens, Room to Read will continue to support children and teachers into the recovery and rebuilding phases.

PROGRAM REACH IN 2021

Thanks to the support of our community around the world, Room to Read was able to globally support +32M children in 2021 alone, helping them to rise above seemingly insurmountable obstacles and pursue their dreams. With innovative strategies in Bangladesh, we supported the government in achieving the SGDs and also contributing to our global target of benefiting 40 million children by year 2025. As of the end of 2021, Room to Read Bangladesh benefited over 0.4 million children in 5 districts. This includes an estimated +8M *new* children served directly and indirectly in 2021. We reached these children through innovations to our work designed to overcome C19-induced challenges.

Regular support:

Literacy Program	In 2021	2009 -2021
Children supported	469,494	0.4M
Teachers supported	4,894	14,816
Schools supported	*753	1,852
Children's books printed	234,854	2.8M

* Plus 6,251 learning facilities in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar

Girls' Education Program	In 2021	2009-2021
Girls supported	3,927	6,886
School transport	0	3,532
Secondary graduates	824	562
Child marriage prevented	442	605*

* We had to avert repeated attempts at child marriage, hence a few girls were counted can be more than once .

C19 pivots in Literacy Program



2.6K primary school teachers trained



432 hours of virtual training via 13 videos



471K SMS nudges sent to parents



7080K parents reached with nudges on 3 national TVs



41K children received print materials



446K story cards based on 50 titles distributed

and in Girls' Education Program



2970 girls engaged in creative/arts



2353 girls watched distance learning



3964 girls received remote individual mentoring



89K individual mentoring sessions delivered



3822 girls joined group mentoring remotely



3806 parents joined virtual workshops

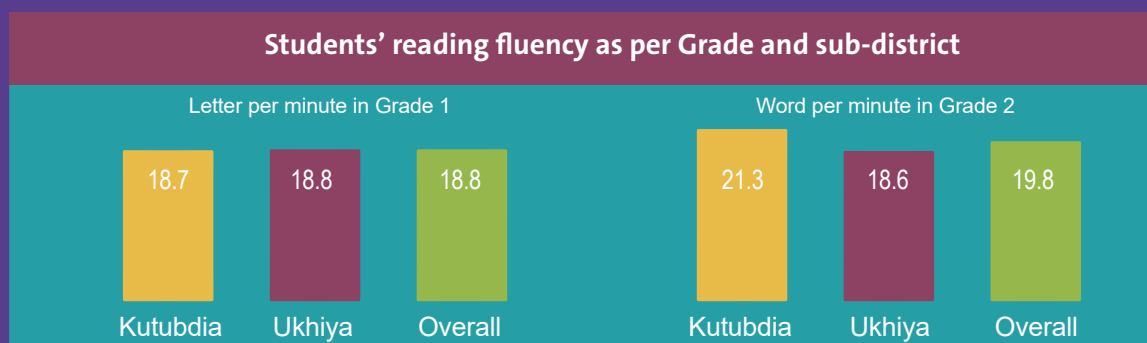
Increase in Literacy Program support: 2020-2021

Responding to demand from the government and the communities we support, 77 new literacy-focused videos were telecasted to reach children. We also used virtual platforms to reach Primary school teachers, students and their families to keep children learning. With the power of technology, Room to Read Bangladesh kept the social buzz up to promote children’s learning endeavors during the crisis. We also distributed low-tech print materials – including books and printed worksheets – to children in support of their at-home learning.

We distributed hardcopy learning materials essential especially for children who did not have access to digital platforms. In certain communities, these materials were the only learning resources children have access to during their forced, prolonged stay at home. We built the capacity of teachers, school leadership, parents and authors/illustrators to continue to support education endeavors since the beginning of the global crisis. The table below summarizes our Literacy Program pivots for 2021 and compares them against our 2020 achievements to assess increased/deprioritized investment.

2020	2021	Indicators/activities
134	77	unique learning videos broadcast via TV
0	10	programs/episodes broadcast via radio
75	3	learning assets uploaded onto government’s website
470,562	936,066	direct messages to mobile phones to nudge towards learning
196	203	content on social highlighting importance of continued edu
41,184	63,724	children received non-digital material (storybook, worksheet)
432	244	hours of virtual training delivered to teachers, school leadership

We wanted to check the usage and efficacy of the learning materials we made available to children. With this in mind, we initiated a study in Cox’s Bazar to assess learning outcome of 600 students of Grades 1 & 2 who received various learning materials during school closure.



The study conducted at the household level of the learners revealed that 53% of Grade 1 and 72% of Grade 2 learners read the story cards by themselves. Regarding the worksheets replenished frequently, 65% of both Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners used them to practice writing at home. As a result of these continued learning support activities, 12% of Grade 1 learners and 11% of Grade 2 learners could read ≥ 45 letters/minute (benchmark set by Room to Read) – while 25% of them correctly answered all of the comprehension questions asked during reading assessment of the study. Access to and use of resources was helpful.

Increase in Girls' Education Program support: 2020-2021

To meet the growing Program needs targeting retention of adolescent girls, to engage them with various forms of creative vocation for psychological support as well as to counter external factors associated to child marriage, harassment and any trauma, Room to Read Bangladesh used a range of virtual platforms to reach girls and their families. The central takeaway in all our work was to keep the importance of girls' education front-and-center.

Complementing our virtual and digital strategies, we created and adapted a range of hard-copy materials to support girls' learning at home. In the form of individual and group remote mentoring sessions from the beginning of the crisis through 2021, we also provided critical touchpoints for girls to address any and all factors the girls felt as hindrances to continuing education and, when schools would open, return to school.

When schools did open in September, 98% of girls we support returned to school.



The table overleaf summarizes our Girls' Education Program pivot activities for 2021 and compares them against our 2020 achievements to assess increased/deprioritized investment. We tracked the numbers on a weekly basis throughout the year.

To measure the effect of virtual learning and remote mentoring sessions among our Girls' Education Program participants, we conducted a survey following quantitative research methods in Dhaka, Natore and Cox's Bazar. Telephone interview of 316 adolescent girls – of Grades 7 and 10 – was conducted using a semi-structured interviewer-administered Q/A.

2020	2021	Indicators/activities
26	6	programs/videos broadcast via TV
177,766	327,794	direct messages sent to cellphones to nudge towards learning
93	63	content on social highlighting importance of girls' education
0	0	learning assets uploaded onto govt or partner websites
1,886	3,718	girls received non-digital materials (books, manual etc.)
75,866	119,222	individual mentoring sessions delivered remotely
4,053	3,977	girls received individual mentoring session

The study revealed that overall, 96.5% of the girls interviewed participated in our life-skills education sessions. While 3 in every 4 girls joined the sessions via conference calls, 1 in every 3 girls watched our televised content on government-run *Sangshad* TV. Overall, 98.1% of the girls interviewed correctly responded to 50% of the life-skill practice level questions.

Almost 40% of the girls responded correctly to 80% of the concept level questions. 9 in every 10 girls (in both Grades) participated in remote individual mentoring sessions while almost all (97.1%) of the girls reported that they benefited from these sessions. To our joy, 95.9% were reportedly able to utilize life-skills to resolve challenges.



CHILDREN'S LITERACY

OUR LITERACY PROGRAM transforms primary schools to enable children to become independent readers and lifelong learners. Our Literacy Program trains and coaches teachers, creates quality books and curricular materials and establishes libraries filled with diverse children's books in local languages that can be enjoyed at school or home. We partner with local communities, governments and the publishing industry to test and implement innovative models that help children succeed in school and develop a love of reading.

The following section highlights our work in 2021, but it should be noted that as the C19 pandemic and associated school closures continued for the most of 2021, we continued program adaptations in 2021 alongside our regular activities.

Before COVID	In 2020	2020-2021
LITERACY PROGRAM COMPONENTS FOR IN-PERSON LEARNING	ADDITIONAL WAYS OF WORKING TO BENEFIT CHILDREN REMOTELY	MIXED MODALITY APPROACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher training and support • Safe and child-friendly learning environments • Quality reading materials • Family and community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital books • TV and radio programming • Guidance via messaging, calls, emails and social media • Hard copy learning materials • Virtual training and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hybrid approach incorporating locally-relevant in-person and remote elements to support dignified and inclusive learning for as many children as possible

The education emergency caused by the C19 pandemic set students' education back – arguably reversing a decade of development investments. We know that it is crucial for students to develop literacy skills early and a habit of reading in early Primary school, so they have a strong foundation for the rest of their education and beyond. C19 induced closures and the fear of a 'shadow pandemic' in education continued to heighten our literacy asks manifold. To keep children engaged in their studies despite closures, we adapted our Literacy Program to reach children in innovative ways during the crisis by

1. developing learning content that cater to the rising/changing need
2. delivering low-tech print and digital learning resources to children
3. extending support to educators and officials for capacity building

Good news first! After the 18-month closure, schools finally opened all over Bangladesh on 12 September 2021 with limited provision of classes per week for Primary school students. However, after such prolonged closure, the possibility of mass student dropout was highly likely. To our surprise, some 40,522 students out of 54,682 (who enrolled in school at the beginning of January 2021) returned to school. The survey was conducted in October in 120 project schools.

1. Development of learning content

When schools reopened in September, government decided to implement an accelerated learning package. We wanted to extend technical support – however, although the scope to implement our regular Literacy intervention was limited in this context, we developed an accelerated learning package based on the national curriculum’s ‘Must Learn’ competency of NCTB textbook so that early-Grade students can recover from learning loss.

Moreover, we also worked with NAPE and NCTB to develop a ‘remedial package’ to support students in achieving their Grade-level target competencies. We liaised with government and distributed the ‘remedial package’ to 21,458 learners at home together with a guideline for their parents. We also remembered to follow up with them for further learning support over phone.

To develop a ‘Pre-Primary Education’ (PPE) package for our custom project as well as for our first-ever direct intervention in the Pre-Primary school level in Moulvibazar, we analyzed the government’s existing materials such as teaching-learning resources for students, teacher guides and training packages. After analysis, we provided recommendations for an ideal PPE package in line with PPE competencies of the government curriculum and developed a teacher training manual for the package itself.

For creating ‘home is a learning space’ where learners were their own instructors, we developed instruction videos with all the vowel letters and 15 consonants. These audio-visual assets were also useful for teachers to refresh their knowledge on scientific alphabet teaching as well as to support them in helping students recover from learning gap. Moreover, as oral language intervention, 20 conversation charts and 10 Big Books with instruction for the teachers were developed for the Pre-Primary level.

To ensure children’s nonstop access to writing materials at home, we developed worksheets for Grades 1-2 students alongside booklet of worksheets in 3 phases and parents’ instruction manual. These worksheets were distributed at the student’s doorsteps. These materials were aligned to the academic plan of Primary schools and its content sequences as demarcated by NAPE and NCTB. We also reviewed the workbooks and finalized instructional suggestions for teachers of Grades 1-2 for two of our projects funded by WFP and UNICEF. With these projects, we are supporting 483 government Primary schools in the host community in Cox’s Bazar host communities increasing development investment.

To help make learning experience fun and interactive, we developed interactive games for the development of children’s reading skills. The simple game-based guideline for teachers was designed to provide support to students in easily coping with rigorous learning activities after returning to school following their prolonged absence. The game-based guideline, 24 indoor and outdoor activities focused on literacy as well as an awareness and understanding of the Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aspects. Besides embedding child-centered pedagogy, gender and inclusion in the learning materials and relevant guidelines/tools, we developed our collaboration-focused program model.



To help children understand and process their experiences during this unprecedented time, Room to Read created a COVID-19 book series. A global workshop with book creators from 10 countries including Bangladesh was organized to develop 20 book titles around how children were experiencing C19. Besides developing expository nonfiction for the 'Global Book Series on Climate Change', we developed the outstanding The Stage of Forest as part of our 'Folklore and Environment Global Book' project.



For learners in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, we developed 10 storybooks in both Burmese and English languages with support from UNICEF. Following the writers' workshop, 10 illustrators mapped characters based on the stories. We also developed our first ever children's graphic novels in Bangla: Benu and Haru Went to The City and When Will They Come? at a global book launch with 20 participating countries.

2. Reaching children where they are

Even though schools reopened, classes were limited in the number of sessions delivered and also in terms of student turnout. Moreover, schools opened in full for students of certificate exam levels; learners in other Grades were still staying home for the most part of the week. In this scenario, a blended mode of education was the way forward. This was also endorsed by the government. We offered our literacy content in a variety of mediums. Wherever possible, we provided books, worksheets and other learning resources to homes so children had access to hard copy learning materials. We partnered with schools and other organizations to distribute these resources to children at home. To support us with these door-to-door deliveries were sometimes witnessed by local gov officials and headteachers who posted instructions on their social media accounts on our behalf and showed up on site to support with the distribution. What an inspiration for all of us!



For numerous families, Room to Read learning materials were the only learning resources children received during the pandemic. We continued to distribute exercise books, worksheets, letter charts and storybooks in the form of story cards. We delivered a total of 36,295 materials. We acknowledge educators who took active part in extending support to handover the learning materials to children via their parents.

Besides hosting content online and leveraging social media platforms to spread them, we sent direct messages, pre-recorded audio content via toll free voice calls as well as local and national TVs to ensure children remained engaged in education at home. We conducted outreach, including literacy tips for parents via text message, read-alouds sent via WhatsApp etc.

A total of 257,580 SMS and phone calls containing links to Room to Read content hosted on government's learning platform EduHub, TV broadcast schedules and other programmatic communication were sent to a total of 26,538 households. Our Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) carrying 20 toll-free literacy-focused content such as rhyme, song, riddle and mini-stories also delivered SMS containing links to downloadable audio content of choice.

To continue to bring new learning materials to children stuck at home and needing new learning materials, we produced the fourth season of read-aloud storybooks on the nationally popular channel NTV. A total of 20 new storybooks of various genres and themes were read out by Bangladeshi celebrities who presented the stories 'in-character' and asked comprehension questions to retain audience. We opened up this quiz competition to the whole nation and secured high number of responses. In 2021, a total of 78 videos were aired to bring the joy of reading at home. Read-aloud videos were also uploaded on EduHub for wider reach.



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Trust for Blind

Throughout the school closure and afterwards, this is how we continued to connect Primary school children with print, digital and electronic learning materials. Children were happy to access new resources at home. We also reached students at respective homes through community volunteers who – with support from adjacent school and SMC members – formed community-based reading forum. We have high ambitions with these forums turning community spots into a place of reading, learning-sharing and inspiration.

3. Teacher training and collaboration

One of the regular and major investment we make is in building capacity of teachers in literacy and library best practices – assisting them in developing their skills and knowledge on effective literacy instruction and library management with ongoing job-embedded support through our literacy coaches. When C19 restrictions eased, we did deliver a few in-person trainings and ToTs. However, the trend of the year showed a knack for virtual platforms for several reasons.

During the closures, we built the capacity of teachers, school leadership, book creators, parents and other stakeholders mostly through virtual outreach. Our remote support allowed them to keep children learning during school closures while securing their commitment to addressing learning loss when schools would re-open. We were ready to conduct face-to-face training with teachers – however, we realized it was a general need, a call of the time.

2021 was the year we digitalized our training contents for an online teacher training for the first time. Titled ‘Library Management and Activity’, the self-paced training module is hosted on the *Muktopaath* website – government’s digital learning platform. Made possible through an MoU with a2i (Aspire to Innovate), the collaboration resulted in more than 80% teachers of Primary schools we support re-learning about the learning outcomes of library management and the reading hour activity.



The course is available here: <https://www.muktopaath.gov.bd/>

While we considered hosting our training course on government portal as the first step towards activating classroom-corner libraries in all government Primary schools across the country, we also engaged Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) to host training on ‘facilitation skills’ for the PTI Instructors, who are master trainers of our UNICEF-funded literacy project in Cox’s Bazar host community. Education Sector officials were also present during the training. We delivered training on ‘Instruction for Reading Skills’ to Primary school teachers supporting them to strengthen students’ reading skills.



With continued disruption in education due to COVID-19, Room to Read Bangladesh continued to transform face-to-face program activities to virtual engagements. As a part of this effort, we conducted 93 hours of virtual training for teachers and school leadership through Zoom, and Google Meet.

The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) organized a 5-day workshop to develop guidelines for textbook writers and to define standards. We extended technical inputs in this workshop and reinforced the importance of early-Grade reading and core elements of our approach, including the explicit teaching of graphemes in a productive sequence and the provision of using decodable text in a developmentally appropriate progression.



We were dedicated to ensuring that education endures for children in all the communities we serve in the face of C19 and beyond. To facilitate that, we will continue to track students’ progress and engage using our pivot indicators. Even though schools feel like getting back to normal schedules, we know this does not mean that children will return to school or that their studies will resume as normal.

During this re-entry, we are determining which pivot activities will continue to be useful. We anticipate that the channels we have built for distance learning will remain critical in ensuring stability and consistency for students. Therefore, we seek to create a blended program approach combining our pivot activities with our standard Literacy Program.



GIRLS' EDUCATION

Our GIRLS' EDUCATION PROGRAM equips girls with the skills to succeed in school and make key life decisions. We prepare girls to make positive change by providing life-skills curriculum, psychosocial support via mentorship and peer support while engaging family and community. Our program supports young people of all genders to build knowledge and skills to co-create a gender-equal world. We also support government and donors deliver similar program through their own education system.

The following section highlights our work in 2021, but it should be noted that as the COVID-19 pandemic and associated school closures continued for the most of 2021, we continued to implement program adaptations in 2021 alongside regular activities.

Before COVID	In 2020	2020-2021
GIRLS' EDUCATION COMPONENTS FOR IN-PERSON LEARNING	ADDITIONAL WAYS OF WORKING TO BENEFIT GIRLS REMOTELY	MIXED MODALITY APPROACH
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Life skills education • Mentorship • Material and academic support • Family and community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote mentoring • Increased monitoring for at-risk girls • Direct messaging • Television broadcasts • Hard copy materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A hybrid approach incorporating locally-relevant in-person and remote elements to support dignified and inclusive learning for as many girls as possible

The education emergency caused by the C19 pandemic posed a number of challenges for adolescent girls in Secondary schools dreaming to get an education and chart their path to a dignified life. The importance of girls' continuing education and not falling prey to child marriage or sexual harassment cannot be overstressed. C19-induced closures school, forced stay at home and the fear of a 'shadow pandemic' in education disrupting the academic calendars and associated life goals continued to heighten these factors. We doubled our Girls' Education Program interventions to reach girls and their parents innovatively and frequently by –

1. developing content to empower girls and engage them with education
2. delivering content and securing mental health from potential trauma
3. conducting follow-up and remote mentoring to keep their hopes up

When Secondary schools finally opened, majority of adolescent girls we support returned to school. Our survey among 3,788 girls showed, 92% attended at least 1 class in the first 6 weeks of school opening, which was higher than the national average. Our percentage was also greater than the data from a national survey by 19 I/NGOs: Secondary school attendance was 60-70%. Our content and monitoring clearly defied the likelihood of mass dropouts.

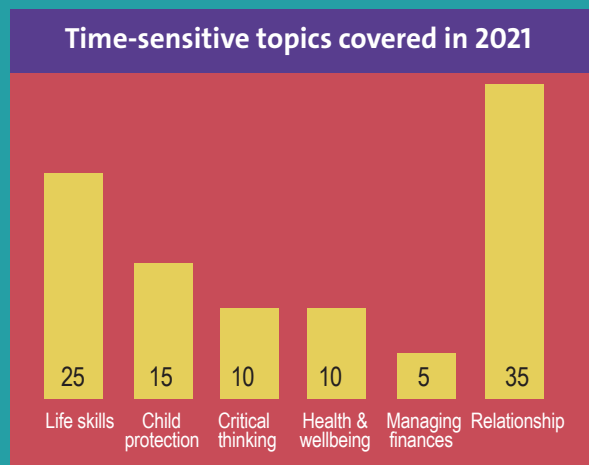
1. Production of learning content

Adolescent girls were particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the C19 pandemic; domestic responsibilities and financial hardships affected women severely and disproportionately. Once the crisis was over, there was high risk of girls not returning to school. Girls of families from the low-income communities we support were highly likely to fall victim to child marriage, sex trafficking or other means of exploitation. As families navigated through unprecedented levels of stress, the risk of intrafamily conflict and gender-based violence also increased across country negatively impacting girls' self-confidence, wellbeing and their ability to negotiate key decisions.

Therefore, we adapted our programs to support learning continuity and are grateful that our work continued to evolve. Although school closures interrupted our usual program operations, we strategically pivoted our program activities to develop learning content creating distance and remote learning opportunities for adolescent girls as well as guidelines for their guardians. We set these against new, measurable indicators and felt that the girls needed increased learning scopes to become resilient against C19 challenges. Under the 'Safe Back to School' banner, we moved together with 15 I/NGOs working in Bangladesh's education sector to voice this rising need (CD's message) and continued to strengthen programs with evolving strategy and content.

As part of a series of life-skill videos we started developing and disseminating in 2020, 12 more videos were developed for the *Amar Ghore Amar School (my school at home)* of *Sangshad TV* – one of government's national televisions turned popular as a distance learning platform during C19 closures. Developed in close collaboration with the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), our video content continued to cover a wide range of life-skills necessary for adolescent girls to maneuver through the pandemic and beyond.

A total of 6 topical themes covered by 20 videos (including 12 of 2021) – each 20-25 minutes in length – were made available to the nationwide audience. Major portion of the content and topic discussed focused on gender-transformative incidences and made use of frequent visual aids to clarify the topic, reinforce the message and engage the audience. The videos offered actionable strategies and stimulated meaningful change in gender norms evidenced in the quiz responses.



A total of 584 girls participated in the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam. 562 girls passed the exam with an overall success rate 96.23%, which was higher than the national average 93%. Moreover, 60.67% of girls received 'A+' and 'A-' ratings and 188 received 'A' rating. This inspired us all at Room to Read and also the communities. In 2021, a total of 266 girls participated in Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) exam. Overall, 97.37% of the girls we support attended it.

2. Engaging girls for mental wellbeing

In order to reach as many children as possible despite obstacles such as the lack of access to internet, financial hardship and low levels of parental engagement, we designed and delivered programmatic pivots to be both evidence-based and context-specific. To complement these activities, our global research, monitoring and evaluation team developed an additional set of indicators that enabled tracking and measuring our pivots on a weekly basis.



We liaised with DSHE as well as the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MoWCA) to disseminate the crucial video content that not only engaged girls with their ‘learning at home’ activities – they also equipped girls with diverse life-skills necessary to negotiate key life decisions. Telecasted weekly and hosted on our YouTube for repeat views, these video content went out with notifications delivered to girls and their parents via WhatsApp and text messages. To increase accessibility, we also embedded English subs and cross-posted on Facebook.



Targeting the girls of Grades 6-10 and their families with no access to television, we transformed our usual program content into radio scripts. With ‘My Mentor’ as our working title, we initiated discussion with Bangladesh Radio to air 20 episodes of it unveiling our mentoring program to the aid of all girls and boys across the country. An MoU was drawn up with Bangladesh *Betar* with January 2022 as a tentative timeline for the radio program launch.

Prolonged, obligatory homestay could distress the mental wellbeing of children – especially of adolescent girls. We doubled our outreach to focus both on their continued education and creative vocation. GEP girls continued learning at home and watched televised learning programs. They also took up creative vocation. In 2021, 2,095 girls engaged themselves in 57,677 pivot activities ranging from writing essays, painting, gardening to handicrafts – all besides continuing to watch distance learning program at home.



Room to Read got me to try a creative activity at home. I chose to paint. I think I have found my talent. I love exploring the imaginative side. I think I will make a drawing teacher one day.

- **Anika, Cox's Bazar**



Communicating the importance of education was often not enough. For many families in the low-income communities that we support, financial hardship magnified due to the general lack of employment during C19 lockdown. To support girls of these families, we extended need-based support so that they could meet admission/tuition fees and registration fees, procure exercise books, textbooks etc. Moreover, as per requests from headteachers and the SMC, we distributed our life-skill education workbooks to girls in 9 Secondary schools maintaining C19 health safety measures during distribution. Girls were elated to receive the materials and utilize them at home.

Cost-efficiency learned through adapted ways of working (such as training and workshops delivered virtually) was a new feather to our hat of innovation. Besides connecting with the girls via regular follow-ups for individual and group monitoring when issues arose, we conducted training of our staff members on holding remote life-skill discussions and also efficiently engaging families on issues facing the girls we support.

To be equipped in remotely handling individual and societal issues facing the girls and ideating probable solutions, we also assessed staff capacity and developed psychosocial manuals. In a 10-day training organized to build capacity both virtually and in-person, the sessions delivered focused on psychosocial support, life-skills education, mentoring as well as family and community engagement.



Room to Read works to minimize negative attitude toward girls in my community. Throughout school closure, they stayed in touch with us, following up about Akhi and her education.

- Forida, Akhi's mom



3. Remote follow-ups and mentoring

Our girls' education and gender equality work is centered around keeping girls successfully engaged in school and helping them develop the life-skills they need to gain agency over their own lives. We know that with a quality education and mentorship, girls can grow into fulfilled women, reaching heights they never thought possible. Unfortunately, C19 pandemic continued to disrupt schooling in 2021 and significantly jeopardized girls' opportunities and futures.

To redress the challenge, the third major investment we made was creating frequent touchpoints for girls across all our working locations. Delivered as friendly conversations and inquiring about whereabouts, we ensured increased monitoring of girls we felt were at risk of dropping out, child marriage, or showing early signs of mental stress. We also increased our engagement with and guidance for parents of the girls via various means of communication.

We conducted 596 parenting sessions discussing girls' education, gender awareness, future plans for their daughters, relationship building etc. The objective was to create an enabling environment for the girls to continue their education with their parents furthering the agenda as in-house pressure groups and thus strategically minimizing any opposing voices within the family. This earned us quick results. We prevented 97 cases of dropout and, with support from school authorities and local government officials, stopped 34 cases of child marriages.



This activity was largely guided by our ‘non-return’ risk indicators to track girls who are at risk of not returning to schools when they reopen. We enhanced our existing system to monitor girls more closely and support those who were particularly struggling during the pandemic. During individual remote mentoring sessions, we conducted a brief risk survey with girls. The 3 risk factors we tracked were: girls who were not continuing to study at home; girls’ family member had lost a job or source of income due to C19; and girls concerned about returning to school.

Our individual and group mentorship provides a lifeline for adolescent girls. This support became even more crucial in 2021. We continued to provide emotional and information support during group and individual mentoring calls with girls. We made use of messaging platforms such as WhatsApp, but largely focused on remote 1-on-1 and conference calls. We prioritized wellbeing, learning at home, staying safe and return to school.

As with our literacy facilitators in the Literacy Program pivot activities, texting and phone-based messaging as well as calls were the best ways for our social mobilizers (outreach workers) to keep in touch with the adolescent girls we support. Our country teams used a range of virtual platforms to reach the girls and their families. We sent a total of 223,690 messages.

‘International Day of the Girl Child’ is celebrated worldwide stressing on the rights, safety and education of girls. Our program participants celebrated the day by painting, crafts-making, writing poems and holding awareness- raising discussion with family and community members. We also celebrated the day with the National Girl Child Advocacy Forum (NGCAF) and delivered a message of solidarity from our country lead Rakhi Sarkar.

We also partnered with NGCAF to mark the International Women’s Day 2021 on a webinar chaired by Ms. Nasima Begum ndc, honorable Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission. We renewed our program ask and accentuated program/support needs felt by adolescent girls on a journal *Kannya Shishu Barta* (trans: news of adolescent girls). In the local level, we participated in poster campaigns building awareness on gender equality.

We remain dedicated to ensuring that education endures for adolescent girls in the communities we serve directly. To facilitate that, Room to Read will continue to track girls at risk of dropping out or child marriage, and engage using our pivot indicators. We know opening of schools does not warranty girls’ return to school.

During this re-entry, our country teams are determining which pivot activities will continue to be useful as girls re-enter classrooms. We anticipate that the content and channels we have built for distance learning and remote monitoring will remain critical in ensuring stability and consistency for the girls. Therefore, we seek to create a blended program approach combining our pivot activities with our standard Girls’ Education Programs.



CUSTOM PROJECTS

Through OUR CUSTOM PROJECTS, we collaborate with governments to test and implement our innovative models that can be integrated into the education system to deliver positive outcomes for children at scale. Working with regulatory bodies and institutional donors to customize our tested education program and contextualize the systemic inequities that influence the communities we support. We operate at the nexus of school and community-level implementation and education systems.

Facing the challenges posed by school closure and C19 restrictions, we liaised with our institutional donors to, and set our priorities for our custom projects to continue to remotely reach children and educators with learning resources. We focused on activities that did not require direct engagement with schools or teachers. We also developed and disseminated teaching-learning resources and ensured fresh supply of stationaries where children were, and moved in-person training to online modules in partnership with a2i.

Unfettered by seemingly insurmountable obstacles, we revisited our priorities for custom projects to deliver timely, relevant assets such as Pre-Primary packages to aid learning gap/loss, guides, modules and instruction videos for teacher, parenting and SMC manuals, worksheet booklets as well as dialogue chart to support teaching instructions and learning. We also planned on developing an assessment model for gender-sensitive school/classroom.

World Food Programme and Room to Read Bangladesh, with funding from ‘McGovern-Dole Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program’, implemented a technical assistance project in Cox’s Bazar since 2018. The project funded by WFP adopted alternative ways to reach learners despite closures and general restrictions on movement. The intervention was to ensure students’ reading-writing activity during school closure.

Sometimes accompanied by local gov officials going rounds in the communities with us, we continued to deliver hard-copy learning assets (such as remedial package with guidelines, worksheets, story cards, and exercise books etc.) at children’s home maintaining C19 health safety measures. This helped engage the community on children’s literacy, and also inspire them to continue the blended mode of education when schools reopened.

We also trained teachers on literacy instruction and library management and trained head teachers as well as local government officials on school management, leadership development, monitoring and supervision. This is besides 13 videos developed for teachers’ capacity building on instruction and library, trauma-informed teaching as well as on SEL.

Besides 40 celebrity read-aloud videos aired on national and local TVs and YouTube channel as well as government’s learning platform EduHub, we sent out messages with links to digital learning resources. To retain and engage audience, we piloted quiz based on each week’s content. We transformed 20 of our storybooks into digital format that offers readers highly immersive experience with read-along and read-aloud functionalities as well as options to join a quiz section and interact with content (sentence to word levels).



We continued to deliver free audio content to aid children learning at home. We made read-aloud stories, riddles, songs and rhymes accessible to children via free audio-calls, and children – with help of their parents – accessed ±22,144 minutes of audio content in 2021.

UNICEF partnered to implement Room to Read Bangladesh first-ever Education in Emergencies intervention aimed to improve learning outcomes of the children in the refugee camps in Cox's Bazar. With Room to Read in the technical lead, the project that initiated as a 12-month engagement expanded to 40 months benefiting more than 300 thousand children. To enhance their reading skills and embed a habit of reading among 6th and 8th Graders classified as per the Myanmar Curriculum Pilot Program (MCP), we transformed 30 storybooks into Burmese and English. We also embedded Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) aspects into all learning assets to facilitate children's language transition. We also developed 6 Teacher Instruction sheets to support educators.

During the project closure workshop, attendees from ES were appreciative of the standard of support Room to Read ensured and the quality of the materials developed. Tazreen Chowdhury – representative from the Education Sector – mentioned ASER as a milestone Intervention. Ralph Zireva, from UNICEF, lauded Room to Read as one of the most reliable partners.

To address the learning loss in the camps, we developed a catch-up package on Burmese language, English language, and Numeracy for learners of Levels I & II. To go with it, we readied 154 Master Trainers from various organizations who are partners with UNICEF or were intervening under the ES in Cox's Bazar.

Our 10 new storybooks, written by a host of writers including 3 from the Rohingya community, focused on inclusion and were rendered into Burmese and English. With UNICEF, 20 new read-aloud audio were aired on Bangladesh *Betar* and Radio *Naf*. Besides, we wanted to assess the competency level of learners in the camps. To that end, the ASER Plus 2nd round assessment was conducted with eye-opening data shared with government.

With a second partnership with UNICEF targeting 346 government Primary schools in the host communities in Cox's Bazar, we modelled learning improvement through strengthening teaching-learning, improving school governance and increasing community engagement. As part of the project, we reached 100,847 learners from Pre-Primary to Grade 5, established 1,349 classroom libraries with 488,914 copies of 135 storybooks designed to aid children's literacy and embed a reading habit. The project also helped strengthen existing academic monitoring, supervision and support structure by working with 2,146 Primary school teachers, 20 government officials and 2,422 SMC members.

Implemented in collaboration with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) at the national level, and DPEO, UEO, URC and PTI at the sub-national level, the project provided supplementary teaching-learning materials that are gender-responsive and inclusive.



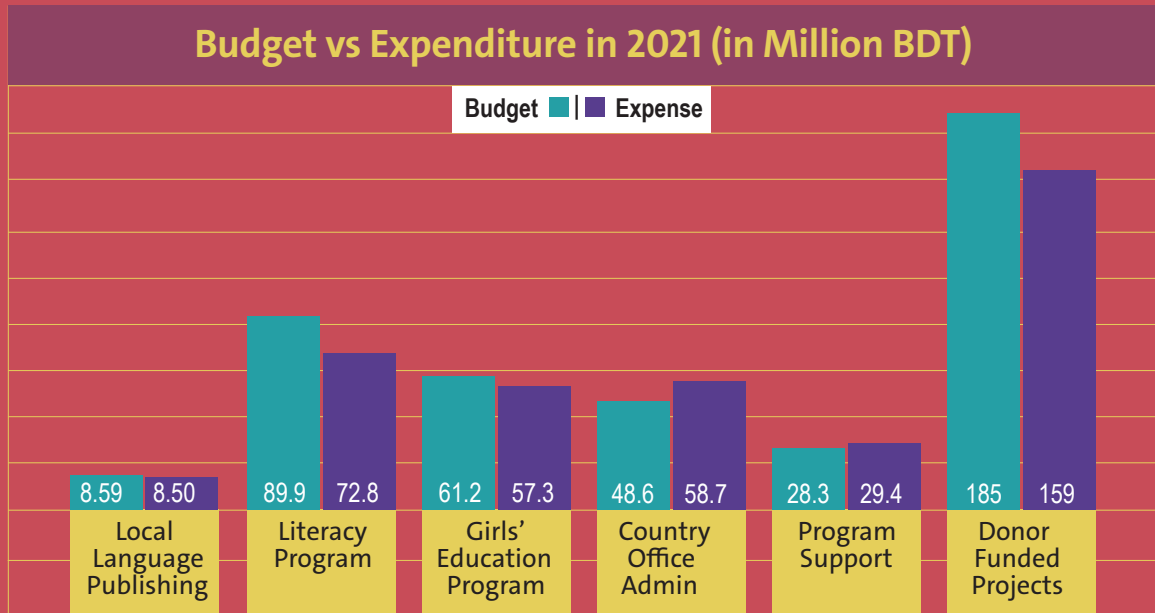
Resource Trainers of Cox's Bazar PTI received refreshers on 'Remote Training Techniques' virtually. Moreover, 5 training modules were developed on SMC leadership, school management, supportive supervision and classroom library for gov education officials. The project also developed 8 training manuals covering supportive supervision to pedagogic practice. Moreover, workbooks were delivered to learners alongside worksheets in 3 instalments.

In partnership with the World Bank, we implemented one of their flagship project on the 'Adolescent Student Program' (ASP) that had two components: the 'Growth Mindset' and 'Girl Rising'. Named 'Bangladesh Adolescent Student Program Implementation Support', the project reached 1,480 students of G8-9 in 72 Secondary schools.

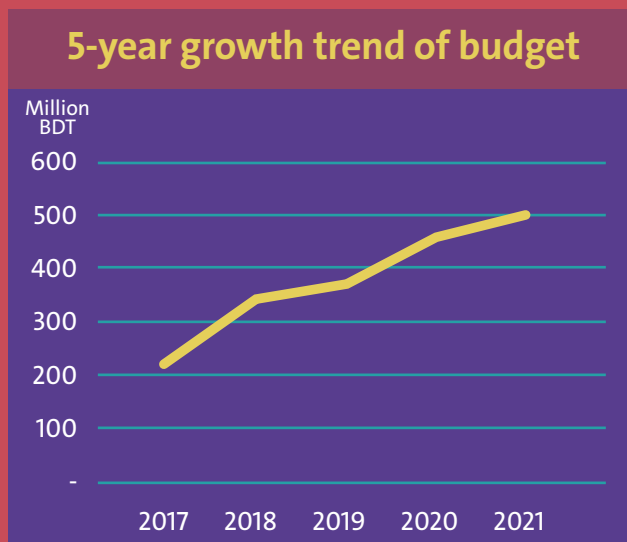
The 'Growth Mindset activity was successfully implemented with 1,147 students virtually (53% were girls) supporting them to build self-confidence. As part of the 'Girls Rising' component, training of 519 students from Sylhet and Chattogram was conducted. We also extended intensive support for the development of the 'Girl Rising' storybook distributed to program participants who completed the 1st phase of the project. One of the results of the project was seen in the participants' ability to detect gender-based stereotypes.

THE FINANCIALS

Room to Read Bangladesh’s financials show a competitive reflection of achievements against its targets. Despite the school closures and other restrictions, we kept innovative hat on to innovate Program delivery. This helped us spend 98% of our 2021 budget. The bar chart below marking each of the budget heads shows that Room to Read Bangladesh’s budget and expenditure moved closely over the year.



In 2021, Room to Read Bangladesh has implemented five donor funded projects. Three were funded by WFP, the World Bank and USAID separately and other two by UNICEF. In 2021, total budget for donor funded project was BDT 259.4M and expenditure was BDT 164.3M. Chart shows a considerable increase in funding over the last 5 years.



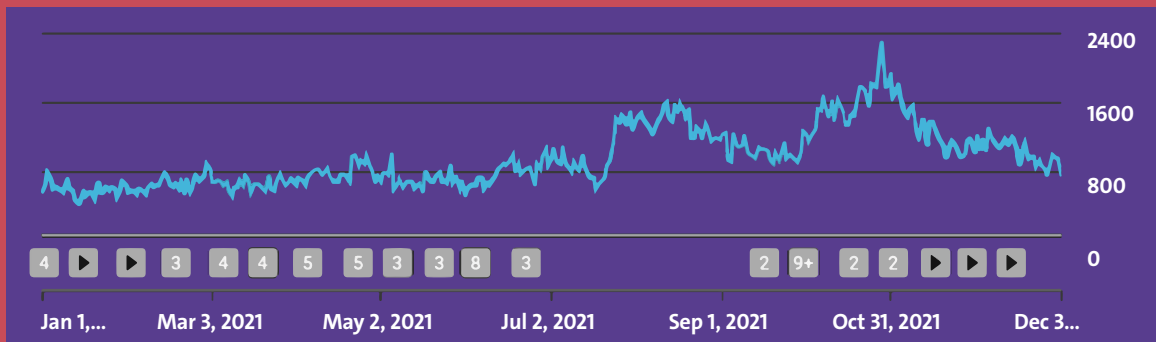
IN THE MEDIA

In 2021, development and dissemination of still and motion graphics as well as live-action videos were major focus of content support and storytelling. We witnessed considerable growth in terms of audience reach and engagement in all of our social media accounts.

On Facebook, we posted 197 content (stories, learning resources etc.). Ranging from photo-cards carrying quotes to program (TV/radio) notifications to video ‘stories of change’ and animated PSA, our content reached a total of +1,614 thousand people who discussed the importance of children continuing education at home and returning to school. We thank our followers to have promoted us in several capacities online. We felt hugely inspired.

Metrics	2020	2021	Growth
People reached	287.3K	1.6M	462%
Net followers	1.6K	8.7K	455%
Engagement	87.4K	247K	183%

In 2021, our reach on YouTube channel increased significantly. We started with 999 subscribers that increased to 1,466 at the end of 2021. Thanks to cross-posting and numerous SMS sent, our ‘organic’-only reach of 67 new content increased exponentially. A total of 335,592 views (185% increase since 2020) recorded a 19,410 thousand hours (213% increase) of video view with a spike in Oct/Nov.



To offer a program-visit experience to our donor during school closures, Bangladesh team facilitated Room to Read’s first-ever ‘virtual field visit’ for Anonymous Foundation. Room to Read CEO Geetha Murali and Chief Program Officer Heather Simpson along with Anonymous Foundation representatives took part in the one-hour event made engaging with in-depth discussions, achievements and testimonies from program participants. Our Country Director Rakhi Sarkar, and Ruksana Sultana, Sr. Senior Manager of Girls’ Education Program, as well as Badruzzaman Khan, our Program Operations Director, presented several aspects of Programs and achievements.

On mainstream media in 2021, content from and quotations or citation of Room to Read Bangladesh earned 5 print and 40 online media appearances/mentions in various capacities.

CORE VALUES AT WORK

Collaboration:

We value partnership.

Action:

We take ownership
to achieve positive outcomes.

Respect:

We find joy in celebrating
accomplishments together.

Education:

We are a learning organization
with a passion for education.

Scale:

We focus on benefiting
the most children possible,
as quickly as possible.



Join us!

If you believe, just like we do, that -

World Change Starts with Educated Children.®

INVEST IN EDUCATION





Contact our head office to get involved.
Donations can be made globally.

JOIN GLOBAL NETWORKS

To get involved in our global network of
volunteers and campaigners, visit
roomtoread.org/take-action

FOLLOW US ONLINE

Want to see how we are making literacy
and gender equality work in Bangladesh?

-  roomtoread.org.bd
-  facebook.com/RoomToReadBangladesh
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Headquarters:	Bangladesh Country Office:	Cox's Bazar Office:	Dhaka Office:	Moulvibazar Office:	Natore Office:
465 California Street, Suite 1000, San Francisco, CA 94104, United States of America	House 31 (4th - 6th floors) Road 4, Block F, Banani Model Town, Dhaka 1213, Bangladesh +88 02 2222 71275	303 ANS Village (1st - 3rd floors) Maddam Baharchora, Abdus Salam Road, Cox's Bazar 4700 +8803416 4131, 025106 0151	AGI Business Center (6th floor) House 81/B-1, Hosne Dalan Road, Chankarpul, Dhaka 1211 +88 02573 00697	Hazi Abdul Bari & Fatema Villa, Juri Road, Uttar Kulara, Kulara, Maulvibazar 3230 +88 01301 475 850	Zamzam Tower (1st - 2nd floors) Holding # 327-05, Mollah Bazar Road, Natore 6400 +88 0771 61040